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The situation in Afghanistan

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The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 65/8 and Security Council resolution 1974 (2011), in which the Council requested the Secretary-General to report on developments in Afghanistan every three months.

2. The report provides an update on the activities of the United Nations in Afghanistan, including significant humanitarian, development and human rights efforts, since the previous report (A/65/873-S/2011/381), dated 23 June 2011. The report also provides a summary of key political and security developments and information on regional and international events related to Afghanistan.

II. Summary of key political and security developments

A. Security situation

3. There were fewer security incidents in July (2,605) and August (2,306) than in June (2,626). As at the end of August, the average monthly number of incidents for 2011 was 2,108, up 39 per cent compared with the same period in 2010. Armed clashes and improvised explosive devices continued to constitute the majority of incidents. The south and south-east of the country, particularly around the city of Kandahar, continued to be the focus of military activity and accounted for approximately two thirds of total security incidents.

4. There were 9 suicide attacks in July, the third successive monthly decrease from a peak of 17 in April. There were 11 suicide attacks in August. As at the end of August, the average monthly number of suicide attacks for 2011 was 12, a level that was unchanged compared with the same period in 2010. Complex suicide attacks

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made up a greater proportion of the total number of suicide attacks. On average, three such attacks have been carried out per month in 2011, a 50 per cent increase compared with the same period in 2010. Insurgents continued to launch complex suicide attacks in urban centres, including the attacks on the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul on 28 June, on the British Council in Kabul on 19 August, in the vicinity of the United States Embassy in Kabul on 13 September and on provincial centres, such as the one on Tirin Kot, Uruzgan Province, on 28 July. The focus of suicide attacks was no longer southern Afghanistan, the central region currently accounting for 21 per cent of such attacks.

5. As in the previous reporting period, insurgents continued to conduct a campaign of intimidation, including through the targeted assassination of high-ranking Government officials, members of the security forces and influential local political and religious leaders. There were 54 incidents in July and 72 in August, killing 89 and 93 individuals, respectively. The following four high-level persons from southern Afghanistan were killed in July: Ahmad Wali Karzai, Head of Kandahar Provincial Council; Hikmatullah Hikmat, Head of Kandahar Ulema Shura; Jan Muhammad Khan, Senior Adviser to the President; and Ghulam Haydar Hamidi, Mayor of Kandahar. News of the assassinations reverberated across the country, raising concerns for the political stability of the south, given the influence exerted by those killed and their ties to the Government in Kabul.

6. On 17 July, the formal process of transition of responsibility for security to the Afghan National Security Forces started in Bamyan, Kabul (except in Sarobi district), Panjsher, the municipalities and corresponding districts of Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif, Mehtarlam and Lashkar Gah. These areas continue to face a resilient insurgency that is attempting to challenge the capacity of Afghan forces to maintain security.

7. At the Security Standing Committee meeting on 28 June, members of the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board agreed to an increase in the number of Afghan National Police from 134,000 to 157,000 and the Afghan National Army from 171,600 to 195,000. In addition, they agreed on accelerated efforts to professionalize the police force, as well as on institutional and administrative reforms to the Ministry of the Interior. Emphasis is increasingly on the capacity of the Afghan National Security Forces to operate independently, with greater concentration by the international community on providing training to the security forces in core areas, including logistics and support. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) continues to monitor and provide advice both to the Government and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) on community-based security initiatives, including the Police-e-Mahali (Afghan Local Police), given the possible fallout linked to issues of impunity, command and control, vetting and the risk of ethnically or politically biased militias re-emerging.

B. Political developments

8. On 23 June, a Special Court created by the Supreme Court ordered 62 changes to the composition of the 249-member Wolesi Jirga (Lower House of the National Assembly) after conducting an ad hoc recount. On 3 August, a decision by the Court of Appeals was reported as confirming the Special Court's findings and directing the issue to the attention of the President. On 10 August, President Hamid Karzai issued

a decree instructing the Independent Electoral Commission to finalize the matter without delay. The Commission re-examined the 62 cases highlighted by the Special Court and, on 21 August, announced nine changes to the membership of the Wolesi Jirga. On 3 September, eight of the nine individuals were sworn in amid tight security; the ninth candidate was sworn in on 10 September, upon returning to Kabul.

9. The dispute over the electoral results and over who was the final arbiter was both a source and symptom of ongoing tensions between the different branches of Government. The Wolesi Jirga, which sat through its summer recess in a show of unity against the Special Court, insisted that the election results were final and that the Independent Electoral Commission had the sole authority on the matter. On 10 August, it passed a resolution repeating its demand for the removal of the Attorney General and the six Supreme Court justices who had created the Special Court. The Supreme Court, on the other hand, continued to assert judicial pre-eminence and, on 16 August, demanded that all 62 changes be implemented by the Commission, reiterating that until that was done it would consider the Wolesi Jirga illegitimate. Throughout the period, the candidates who were backed by the Special Court continued to demand, at a series of demonstrations in Kabul, that all 62 changes be implemented, while a coalition composed largely of opposition Members of the National Assembly and their supporters rejected every single change and held a sit-in for several weeks on the grounds of the National Assembly to voice their dissatisfaction. Since the Commission's announcement, the Wolesi Jirga has been divided, with the above-mentioned coalition continuing to reject the new Members of the National Assembly and refusing to attend sessions as long as their nine former colleagues are excluded. Meanwhile, a new group backs the decision of the Commission, arguing that it is an opportunity to end the impasse.

10. During the reporting period, despite vocal protests by the legislators, the executive branch did not announce nominees for senior appointments, including Cabinet Ministers and Supreme Court justices. The National Assembly, however, continued to exercise its oversight function. The Wolesi Jirga summoned the Minister of Defence, the Minister of the Interior, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Tribal Affairs over the cross-border incidents in Kunar. It also summoned the Minister of Commerce and Industries to answer questions over food prices and the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the National Security Adviser to provide an update on the status of discussions with the United States on a possible strategic partnership. Similarly, the Meshrano Jirga (Upper House of the National Assembly) questioned senior Government officials, including members of the National Disaster Management Authority, about provisions to flood and drought victims, and the Minister of the Interior, about the security situation. Progress on the legislative agenda was slowed down by the focus on the debate over the composition of the Wolesi Jirga and activities of the Special Court, but three bills were passed through the two Houses: the Law on Forests, the Afghan National Army Personnel Affairs Law and the Extradition Law.

11. The High Peace Council and its Joint Secretariat continued their outreach activities, including field trips to Herat, Paktya, Paktika, Kandahar, Takhar and Badakhshan, inaugurating provincial peace committees. They also travelled to Norway, Germany, Indonesia and India, garnering support for the Afghan-led peace process and participating in initiatives to foster a political dialogue. UNAMA continued to offer assistance to the High Peace Council through its Salaam Support

Group. My Special Representative regularly engaged the High Peace Council leadership on views and ideas to promote reconciliation as part of a broader and inclusive peace process. On 28 July, the Taliban issued a public statement asking that it be recognized as a political and military power, in order to play a role in the peace and stability of Afghanistan and the region. In addition, the Taliban called on States in the region to create an environment of cooperation and trust based on common national interests.

12. With the adoption of its resolutions 1988 (2011) and 1989 (2011) on 17 June, the Security Council decided to divide the sanctions list established pursuant to resolution 1267 (1999) and to establish two separate sanctions committees, one targeting individuals, groups, undertakings and entities associated with the Taliban and one targeting Al-Qaida and other individuals, groups, undertakings and entities associated with them. On 18 July, the Council approved the de-listing of 15 former Taliban names from the sanctions list established pursuant to its resolution 1988 (2011). Government and the High Peace Council officials welcomed the de-listing and the establishment of two separate committees, recognizing them as important steps in reconciliation and confidence-building.

13. According to the Joint Secretariat, 2,374 reintegrees had joined the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme as at the end of July, 431 more than in the previous month. Twenty-three provincial peace committees have been formed and approved and are functioning. In addition, provincial Joint Secretariat teams have become operational in 25 provinces. Two training workshops for staff members of those bodies, including their heads, were conducted in June and July with a view to further strengthening their capacities to implement the Programme. Standard operating procedures on vetting, transition assistance, provincial accounts and small grants were approved and distributed to provincial authorities.

C. Regional cooperation

14. The Government of Afghanistan continued to strengthen its dialogue and cooperation with neighbouring countries. In the context of the recently established Afghanistan-Pakistan Joint Commission for Reconciliation and Peace, the operational tier of the Commission met in Kabul on 29 June. Representatives of Pakistan reaffirmed support for peace and reconciliation efforts led by Afghanistan and their readiness to encourage and facilitate an inclusive process. In Kabul on 20 July, the President of Pakistan, Asif Ali Zardari, met with President Karzai to discuss regional and international issues, bilateral relations in political, economic and trade matters, as well as joint efforts against terrorism. It was decided that the Minister for Commerce and Industries of Afghanistan would travel to Islamabad to follow up on challenges to transit between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

15. The Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement, which became operational on 12 June, could represent a significant milestone in facilitating regional trade. Full implementation of the Agreement is now the key to delivering practical economic benefits.

16. Tripartite core group meetings between Afghanistan, Pakistan and the United States of America were held in Kabul on 28 June and in Islamabad on 2 August. The meetings focused on border security, reconciliation and economic issues.

17. The International Contact Group met on 27 June, for the first time in Kabul. In addition, meetings of the Group's regional cooperation working group were held in Istanbul on 3 June and in Kabul on 26 June. The meetings were co-chaired by the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, the Special Representative of Turkey for Afghanistan and Pakistan and my Special Representative. The meetings focused on prioritizing areas for regional cooperation and on the preparations for the Istanbul Conference on Afghanistan, to be held on 2 November 2011. UNAMA and my Special Representative, at the request of the Government of Afghanistan and in cooperation with the Government of Turkey, are supporting the Government of Afghanistan, which will chair the event, in the preparations for the Conference.

18. Afghanistan, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan held a summit in Tehran on 25 June. The Presidents of the three countries signed a declaration on strengthening joint counter-narcotic and counter-terrorism efforts and on expanding political, security, economic and cultural cooperation.

19. An international conference on fighting terrorism, held in Tehran on 25 and 26 June 2011, was attended by the Heads of State of countries in the region, including Afghanistan, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Pakistan and Tajikistan. The United Nations was also represented.

20. A third quadripartite meeting of the Presidents of Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Russian Federation and Tajikistan was held in Dushanbe on 2 September 2011. The leaders of the four countries discussed regional trade and cooperation issues, focusing on joint projects in energy, agriculture, trade and transit. The parties emphasized the importance of implementing the Central Asia-South Asia Regional Electricity Trade (CASA-1000) project, which involves building electricity transmission lines from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to Afghanistan and Pakistan and constructing a trans-Afghanistan gas pipeline. The political agenda for the meeting included items on cooperation in preventing terrorism and extremism and fighting drug trafficking. The Presidents paid special attention to issues related to Afghanistan, including reconciliation, transition and the Kabul Process.

III. Human rights

21. Concerns about the protection of civilians increased with the rise in civilian deaths and injuries. In its mid-year report on the protection of civilians for the first six months of 2011, UNAMA documented 1,462 civilian deaths, an increase of 15 per cent over the same period in 2010, with anti-Government elements responsible for 80 per cent of the deaths, an increase of 28 per cent compared with the same period in 2010. Pro-Government forces were responsible for 14 per cent of civilian deaths, a decrease of 9 per cent over the same period in 2010. In 6 per cent of cases, the civilian deaths could not be attributed to either party to the conflict.

22. From June to August, UNAMA documented 971 civilian deaths and 1,411 injuries, an increase of 5 per cent in civilian casualties compared with the same period in 2010. Anti-Government elements were linked to 1,841 civilian casualties (77 per cent) and pro-Government forces to 282 (12 per cent). The remaining casualties could not be attributed to either party to the conflict. The increase can be attributed, in the context of overall intensified fighting, mainly to the use by anti-Government elements of landmine-like pressure-plate improvised explosive devices and suicide attacks, in violation of international humanitarian law.

Improvised explosive devices and suicide attacks accounted for 45 per cent of civilian casualties, an increase of 177 per cent compared with the same period in 2010. In a disturbing development, anti-Government elements attacked two hospitals and several mosques, places protected under international law. On 25 June, a suicide attack against a hospital in Logar Province killed 25 civilians, including 13 children, and injured 25 others. Targeted killings of high-profile Government officials and individuals associated or perceived to be associated with the Government and/or ISAF occurred throughout the country (see para. 5 above).

23. Air strikes remained the leading cause of civilian deaths by pro-Government forces, killing 38 civilians in July, the highest number recorded in any month since February 2010. The number of civilian deaths from ground combat and armed clashes increased by 84 per cent compared with the same period in 2010. UNAMA documented 38 civilian deaths (7 per cent of all deaths) due to military search operations, a 15 per cent increase over the same period in 2010. Civilian casualties from air strikes and night raids continued to generate anger and resentment among Afghan communities towards international military forces.

24. UNAMA increased its advocacy and monitoring of the implementation of the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women by police, prosecutors and judges. Judicial authorities are increasingly becoming aware of the law. Prosecutors in 28 provinces registered complaints under the law in the past year, although less than one quarter of the cases reached the courts. Instances of violence against women and impunity for perpetrators remained widespread, with much of the violence grounded in harmful traditional practices such as forced and underage marriage. Authorities often failed to investigate and arrest perpetrators of acts criminalized by the law while continuing to arrest women and girls who attempted to flee forced marriages or family abuse, charging them with the intent to commit adultery. UNAMA assisted provincial governors and departments of women affairs in establishing and strengthening provincial commissions for the prevention of violence against women and conducted awareness programmes for members of civil society and officials in 13 provinces.

25. UNAMA advocated the participation of civil society, particularly women, victims and their families, in peace and reconciliation processes, including the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme, stressing the need for dialogue between local populations and those negotiating peace, as well as inclusive representation in all decision-making forums. UNAMA has raised concerns about justice and accountability, including the vetting of former combatants, to ensure that known violators of human rights do not benefit from the Programme, and has advocated that all grievance resolution processes be transparent, be conducted at the community level and not be a substitute for criminal prosecution.

26. In June, under the United Nations country team gender working group initiative in Daykundi, Afghanistan, senior justice officials were trained in the application of protection mechanisms to safeguard women's rights. To date, 6 judges, 22 prosecutors, 28 judicial police officers and 89 community and religious leaders have been trained on land and family law and on the protection of women and children in criminal proceedings.

27. UNAMA continued to observe detention facilities across Afghanistan, including through visits to detention facilities of the National Directorate of Security and the Afghan national police in Kabul, Kandahar, Khost, Kapisa,

Laghman and Takhar to monitor arbitrary detention, ill-treatment and fair trial guarantees. UNAMA investigated allegations of ill-treatment and lengthy detention without charge or trial and lack of access to defence counsel in cases involving conflict-related detainees, including children. UNAMA is discussing with the Government its findings related to the serious mistreatment of detainees in several facilities managed by the National Directory of Security and the national police.

28. Together with the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNAMA facilitated a capacity assessment of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission in May and July 2011. The assessment found that, in order to ensure the long-term sustainability and independence of the Commission, there was a need for a strong legislative framework, increased State funding and closer cooperation with the Government. UNAMA, with international partners, continues to assist the Commission in developing its capacity to fulfil its mandate. UNAMA provided technical assistance to the Human Rights Support Unit of the Ministry of Justice for the development of an action plan to implement the recommendations of the Human Rights Council identified under the 2009 universal periodic review.

29. In the context of the rights of the child, research conducted by UNAMA in five provinces indicated that anti-Government elements recruited children to carry out suicide attacks, plant improvised explosive devices and smuggle weapons and uniforms, and that the Afghanistan National Security Forces recruited boys, with sexual exploitation as one motivating factor. On 6 July, the Minister of the Interior issued a decree reaffirming the commitment of the Government to prevent underage recruitment, sexual exploitation and the killing and maiming of children, all of which contravene national and international laws, by members of its security forces. In a letter to Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs Jaweed Ludin, my Special Representative, on behalf of the United Nations, welcomed the decree. It is crucial that the action plan, which lists measures to be taken against perpetrators, be implemented without further delay.

IV. Governance and the rule of law

30. Within the broader efforts to address corruption in Afghanistan and as part of the recommendation of the London and Kabul conferences to establish a monitoring and evaluation committee, UNAMA and UNDP worked collectively to support the second joint national and international session of the Monitoring and Evaluation Committee, with UNDP serving as temporary secretariat of the body. The Committee is currently finalizing a workplan for the secretariat and identifying benchmarks in the fight against corruption. Donors are coordinating efforts to address corruption through the International Community Transparency and Accountability Working Group, which has agreed to support the Committee in the implementation of the final workplan.

31. In July, the draft national priority programme on law and justice was released. The final national priority programme is expected to function as the justice sector reform strategy for the next three years, placing considerable emphasis on extending the reach of the formal justice system to the provinces and districts. Some parts of the justice system have shown improvement, for example, in terms of providing more legal aid, holding public trials and using evidence rather than confessions as

the basis for convictions. Nonetheless, the justice system continues to face problems, not the least of which is security — a key reason behind the decision to transfer the Central Prison Directorate from the Ministry of Justice to the Ministry of the Interior. I remain concerned that the transfer may detract from the gains achieved in that sector in recent years and that, unless the appropriate structural safeguards are put in place within the Ministry of the Interior, the risk of human rights abuses in prisons will increase.

V. Implementation of the Kabul Process and aid coherence

32. During the reporting period, the Government of Afghanistan and the international community continued to implement the Kabul Process, the process of transition to Afghan leadership and responsibility, which was reaffirmed at the International Conference on Afghanistan held in Kabul on 20 July 2010, including the recent convening, after an eight-month hiatus, of the three standing committees of the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (on security, governance and socio-economic development) on 28 June and on 25 and 26 July. It was agreed that the standing committees would be reconvened in the last quarter of 2011, thus ensuring the continued integrity of the Kabul Process.

33. The three standing committees recommended that seven national priority programmes be presented for endorsement by the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board at its next meeting and agreed, in principle, to an additional six such programmes. The Government of Afghanistan initiated consultations on key governance national priority programmes with a clear commitment to ensuring the finalization of programmes focused on governance and public administration reform at the subnational level. Additionally, it was agreed that the Government of Afghanistan and the international community would establish a task force to initiate consultations on the modification of four of the governance benchmarks agreed to at the International Conference on Afghanistan held in London on 28 January 2010 and the International Conference on Afghanistan held in Kabul on 20 July 2010.

34. The standing committees agreed to the implementation of the operational guide for "off-budget" support of the Government of Afghanistan. Advancing this key policy document is a critical commitment of the International Conference on Afghanistan held in Kabul and is fundamental to continued discussions on improving aid effectiveness. Through a procedure of certification, donors could have their "off-budget" assistance included in an expanded national budget that would allow for multiple resourcing modalities while ensuring Afghan leadership over development and governance resources.

35. On 29 and 30 June, the Government of Afghanistan held a two-day conference to review and address issues relating to the ongoing process of transition of security responsibility to the Afghan authorities. On the first day of the conference Afghan stakeholders, including governors and representatives from ministries and civil society, considered ways to improve coherence within the Government's structures and policies, particularly at the subnational level. On the second day, Government officials were joined by members of the international community, including my Special Representative, to discuss ways to synchronize international support with the principles of Afghan leadership and ownership. The majority of actors involved in the transition process have acknowledged the need to ensure the inclusion of

governance and development strategies in transition areas. As an observer of the process, UNAMA continued to engage with Government and ISAF interlocutors and to work closely with provincial development councils and sector-specific working groups, led by line ministries.

36. Negotiations on an International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme continued. There was greater clarity and understanding between the Government of Afghanistan and IMF on the next steps that need to be taken before an IMF programme can be approved. In recent weeks, the Government has made progress on a number of preconditions for such a programme, which the international community has acknowledged and recognized as a positive development. Discussions on an IMF mission to Kabul in the near future are currently under way. Failure to agree on an IMF programme could have serious negative consequences regarding the ability of several donors to contribute to the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund and the delivery of essential programmes.

VI. Development and humanitarian assistance

37. Humanitarian and development needs in Afghanistan remained high both in scale and scope. The deteriorating security situation hampered safe access to people in need, and the increasing effects of drought-like conditions, caused by low levels of precipitation, created greater needs, particularly in the north. In parts of Balkh, Jawzjan, Faryab, Sari Pul and Samangan provinces, all of the rain-fed crops were lost and many families were estimated to have seen 50 per cent of their livestock die owing to lack of water and animal fodder. Food insecurity and lack of access to clean water led to disease outbreaks.

38. Current needs assessment estimates suggest that as many as 1.3 million Afghans may require some kind of food assistance over the next 10 months, either through cash-for-work schemes or direct food distributions. Over the coming weeks, the Government and humanitarian organizations, with the support of donors, will undertake the emergency interventions necessary to limit the possibility of a major crisis later in the year. In the absence of effective recovery and development programmes, including for disaster risk reduction, the humanitarian community continued to provide assistance to address the life-threatening consequences of recurrent seasonal disasters such as flash flooding. During the reporting period, humanitarian agencies responded with food and non-food relief assistance to the approximately 9,000 families that were most seriously affected by recurrent seasonal disasters in the provinces of Nimroz, Logar, Balkh, Bamyan, Daykundi, Badghis and Herat.

39. Despite the drought, a number of food and agriculture initiatives continued. Seed enterprises supported by the United Nations will meet the 30,000-ton target of certified wheat seed production. The dairy unions produced 2,500 tons of concentrated animal feed for emergency distribution. Other interventions at the household level included "backyard development poultry" projects aimed at 13,000 women in 13 districts in 2011.

40. The ongoing conflict resulted in the displacement of an estimated 130,000 people between 1 January and the end of July 2011, reflecting an increase of 64 per cent over the same period in 2010. The United Nations, through the protection, emergency shelter and non-food items cluster and the internally displaced persons

task force, coordinates responses to the rising rates of displacement. A key challenge is the spread of dry conditions and drought across much of the northern and eastern regions, which increases vulnerabilities and is anticipated to lead to the displacement of even more people.

41. During the reporting period, United Nations agencies supported the Government of Afghanistan to complete the national reproductive health strategy and action plan and the first national policy and strategy of nursing and midwifery services. The National Maternal and Child Survival Committee and eight provincial committees have been established and are now functional. With continued support to the polio eradication initiative, over 10.8 million children under the age of 5 were vaccinated between May and July.

42. "Child friendly" status was awarded to 357 schools, which provided improved sanitation and hygiene facilities with United Nations support. During the reporting period, an additional 68,000 people in rural areas were provided with sustainable sources of safe water, and almost 144,000 families benefited from an emergency response effort led by the agencies of the water, sanitation and health cluster to address cases of acute watery diarrhoea brought about by the drought in the north. For the first time in Afghanistan, two national water quality testing laboratories were established, enabling testing countrywide, which will help improve the authorities' capacity to monitor and address outbreaks of communicable diseases.

43. The United Nations conducted training sessions to strengthen the capacity of extension officers, heads of cooperatives and members of producer groups, youth and women associations, community development councils and district development assemblies on agricultural technology and food processing and preservation. In support of the National Skills Development Programme, the United Nations provided over 48,000 individuals, of whom 55 per cent were women, with vocational skills training across 20 provinces. Community-managed savings and credit facilities were introduced in 20 provinces to promote access to financial services by microenterprises. To date, $1.1 million in savings has been collected by community self-help groups and $7 million was disbursed to community development councils to generate loans in nine provinces.

44. In the context of promoting sustainable livelihoods, over 26.8 square kilometres of agricultural land were cleared of mines and 7,435 mines were removed from 268 minefields, benefiting 73,000 Afghans. In addition, 14,000 Afghans continued to be employed in 24 community-based demining projects; their salaries, coupled with vocational training, will provide them with opportunities to improve their livelihoods once mine clearance in their villages has been completed. With support from the United Nations, the Forestry Law of Afghanistan was approved by the lower house of the National Assembly. The law promotes the development of guidelines and mechanisms for communities to participate in and benefit from natural resources management.

45. At the International Conference on Afghanistan held in Kabul in 2010, the United Nations committed to working towards a "delivering as one" programme delivery approach. Efforts are under way to leverage synergies within the United Nations family and to collaborate towards the achievement of specific results on a thematic basis. The integrated strategic framework encompassing UNAMA and United Nations agencies, funds and programmes took effect on 1 July 2011. Monitoring and reporting on the framework will be carried out on a quarterly basis

through the five relevant United Nations working groups on peace, reconciliation and reintegration; subnational governance and the rule of law; human rights; sustainable livelihoods; and maternal and newborn health.

VII. Counter-narcotics

46. Compared with 2010, there was a 65 per cent increase in the eradication of opium poppy fields in 2011, as verified by the Ministry of Counter-Narcotics of Afghanistan and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. In 2011, 3,810 hectares of opium poppy fields were eradicated throughout 18 provinces, compared with 2,316 hectares eradicated throughout 11 provinces in 2010. Most fields eradicated in 2011 were in the southern, western and north-eastern regions. In 2011, fewer fields were eradicated in the eastern and northern regions than in 2010. In 2011, the number of security-related incidents occurring during eradication has been significantly higher than in 2010: Government-led eradication teams have been attacked 48 times in 2011, compared with 12 times in 2010.

47. At the end of June 2011, the national average price of dry opium was $274 per kilogram, an increase of 104 per cent compared with June 2010. In 2010, opium production was halved, owing mainly to the opium blight. The historically high prices led to a strong increase in cultivation in northern, north-eastern, southern and western provinces.

48. The Ministry of Counter-Narcotics started the National Drug Control Strategy review process in accordance with the commitments made at the International Conference on Afghanistan held in Kabul. The review will be conducted in consultation with key national and international stakeholders involved in counter-narcotic efforts.

VIII. Mission support

49. The process of upgrading the physical security of the field offices continued, including through the establishment of a new compound in Mazar-e-Sharif. In parallel, major security upgrades were carried out in provincial offices, including the provision of in-compound accommodation for all international staff. In spite of the higher bar set by the new minimum operating security standards established following the attack on the UNAMA office in Mazar-e-Sharif on 1 April 2011, it is anticipated that international staff will be able to return to the upgraded offices in six provinces by the end of September.

50. The overall vacancy rate as at July 2011 was 20.2 per cent for international staff and 9.7 per cent for national staff. Effective 1 July 2011, the Kuwait Joint Support Office was designated a family duty station, in line with General Assembly resolution 65/248, entitled "United Nations common system: report of the International Civil Service Commission".

IX. Observations

51. The reporting period witnessed considerable political volatility and disconcerting levels of insecurity for the Afghan people amid a process of transition

to Afghan leadership and responsibility for security. I am deeply concerned about the increasing number of civilian casualties and the effect that the armed conflict is having on civilians who are caught in the middle. The overall volatile security situation also creates a challenging environment for national and international civilians, including United Nations and UNAMA personnel, to operate in and deliver on their mandates. I urge all parties to respect both the letter and spirit of international humanitarian law and strongly encourage all concerned to take concrete steps to protect civilians, including by discontinuing the use of devices and tactics that indiscriminately target and harm the civilian population. For Afghanistan to emerge from the current conflict, both governmental and non-governmental actors must put respect for universal human rights at the centre of their policies and practices.

52. For the transition to Afghan responsibility for security to be successful, it is important that the Afghanistan National Security Forces continue to demonstrate enhanced independent capability and professionalism to assume an increasing level of responsibility and accountability. The formal agreement to increase the size of the Forces is a positive development along the road to greater Afghan sovereignty and long-term stability.

53. Overall, I remain cautiously optimistic about signals of an emerging dialogue as a prerequisite for the development of a broad-based peace and reconciliation process. I therefore urge all Afghans not to succumb to the politics of mistrust, intimidation, fear or revenge, but rather to work together towards reconciling their differences by engaging in constructive dialogue and shaping the framework for a sustainable peace. The momentum for dialogue and reconciliation may be increasing and we must seize this opportunity while it presents itself. Through the good offices of my Special Representative, UNAMA will continue to promote and assist this process through its Salaam Support Group, at the request of and in coordination with the Government of Afghanistan.

54. The Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme has been consolidating after the budget for the Programme was adopted in June. Operational challenges remain, such as the delay in the transfer of funds and subsequent delays in associated development projects, but stakeholders are working to solve the issues. While recognizing that the true potential of the Programme depends upon a successful political process for peace, UNAMA continues to monitor the relevant developments at the national and regional levels and to offer advice and assistance, as requested, to ensure the implementation of the Programme. We look forward to seeing a local grievance resolution process being started so as to ensure that underlying local problems are addressed.

55. Since the inauguration of the National Assembly in January 2011, UNAMA has urged the different branches of Government to work together for a solution to the post-electoral deadlock in line with the Constitution. Responding to correspondence from members of the Wolesi Jirga, on 1 July I wrote to them emphasizing that the issues must be solved in a manner consistent with the principles that underpin Afghan democratic institutions and that does not have a negative impact on peace and stability. UNAMA has continued to back the final authority of the Independent Electoral Commission on electoral issues and, in a statement dated 23 August, welcomed the Commission's announcement as hopefully marking the end of the deadlock and allowing the different branches of Government

to focus on the work ahead. The months of institutional impasse necessitating political accommodation highlight the need for wider buy-in by all Afghan parties on a future electoral framework.

56. The formation of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Joint Commission for Reconciliation and Peace was a positive development that provides a regular structured mechanism for the two countries to discuss and exchange views on reconciliation issues. It is up to both countries to ensure that the Joint Commission becomes effective in facilitating the reconciliation of anti-Government elements and addressing the cross-border dimension of the insurgency. Meetings should continue. Similarly, it is hoped that the tripartite meetings between Afghanistan, Pakistan and the United States will yield positive results in lessening tensions across the border and increasing trust, and that implementation of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement — a significant instrument in facilitating the movement of commodities within the region — can advance cooperatively.

57. The importance of regional cooperation to strengthening the stability and prosperity of Afghanistan cannot be overstated. All States are encouraged to participate in supporting this process in an active and positive manner with a view to further progress being made at the conferences to be held in Istanbul and Bonn later in 2011.

58. The United Nations will continue to support efforts, not only to ensure coherent approaches on the ground by the wide variety of international actors, but also to advocate the need to secure the support of such actors in the long term, including with regard to official development assistance. Coordinated support is necessary if Afghanistan is to meet immediate socio-economic needs and strengthen the institutions that provide basic services to the population, notably in the areas of security, justice, social services and natural resource and disaster management, and thus to make progress towards the Millennium Development Goals by 2020, the target date agreed by Afghanistan. A comprehensive approach on transition to support the medium- and long-term development of Afghanistan and its proper governance should underpin this process. If effective, this approach could rectify the current imbalance between the emphasis placed on security and that placed on governance and development. From a development perspective, the current transition process raises a number of core issues. First, the importance of recognizing that development, governance and the rule of law are crucial if transition is to be sustainable and irreversible. Much will depend on success in strengthening institutions, particularly at the subnational level, on creating jobs and economic opportunities and on access to and delivery of basic justice. Second, although development, governance and the rule of law cannot be delivered in the three-year time frame to 2014 set for the transfer of responsibility for security, there is scope for capturing the current political and financial interest in transition in order to accelerate activities that can help set Afghanistan on a sustainable development course. Third, transition as currently conceived is not easily sustainable, as the multitude of operational and support costs associated with development projects have not been fully assessed. Fourth, the Government of Afghanistan will therefore need long-term international support and private sector investment to boost revenue generation. UNAMA will continue to raise concerns on the broader issues associated with transition, not least its impact on Afghan civilians, who must see their security, human rights and economic opportunities increase as a result of the transfer of responsibilities to the Government of Afghanistan.

59. Governance and development programmes prioritized for implementation in transition should be consistent with the goals set forth in the Kabul Process and the national priority programmes. Hence, assistance should be channelled through and reinforce the established Afghan structures in providing effective governance and delivery of services to the population. The momentum behind the security transition should not be at the expense of, or outstrip, efforts to invest in governance and development processes, particularly as resources in other areas decline. UNAMA welcomes initiatives from the Government to strengthen coherent governance arrangements, management and budgetary capacity at the subnational level and seeks further systemic approaches to capacity development and planning. It is my hope that the Kabul Bank issue will be resolved in a principled and accountable manner, and in a way that does not penalize beneficiaries of programmes that are now in jeopardy as a result of the failure to agree on an IMF programme.

60. The humanitarian situation also continues to be of concern, due to the combination of conflict and natural disasters that exacerbate the effects of chronic poverty and vulnerabilities on the population. However, I am encouraged by the efforts made by the Government and the humanitarian community to respond to the current drought. An ongoing challenge is to ensure a high level of shared understanding of the humanitarian situation, whether relating to populations affected and displaced by insecurity and conflict or to acute needs generated by crop failure or natural disasters. The United Nations is working with national and local authorities and all humanitarian actors to improve analytical tools and strengthen disaster management and preparedness, and encourages the sharing of practical experiences in improving access to people in need. I wish to join in the calls made to mark World Humanitarian Day in Afghanistan: we must not lose sight of the needs of Afghans caught up in the conflict. All parties must respect the principles of humanitarian action in the delivery of assistance, recognizing the imperative of protecting civilians, as well as of safeguarding humanitarian personnel and allowing them access to affected populations.

61. Afghanistan remains by far the largest source of illicit opium and heroin traded globally. The negative impact of illegal narcotics continues to be felt at the national, regional and global levels. In a United Nations report dated July 2011, it was estimated that groups involved in transnational organized crime profited most from the trade, valued at $68 billion, and that Afghan farmers earned only $440 million of that total, undermining efforts made to improve governance and the rule of law. In addition, the health and security implications continue to have profound consequences for the social fabric of society, not just in Afghanistan but in many other countries too. While I am pleased to note the efforts made by the Afghan authorities in reducing production, a global problem of this scale requires global efforts and so I encourage all Member States to continue cooperating in addressing this situation.

62. I would like to thank my Special Representative, Staffan de Mistura, as well as all the UNAMA and United Nations personnel in Afghanistan, both national and international, for their tireless efforts under very challenging conditions. I would also like to thank Deputy Special Representative Martin Kobler, whom I have appointed as my Special Representative in Iraq, for his dedication and enthusiasm in serving the people of Afghanistan.